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THEODORA,

AN ORATORIO.

K

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

VALENS, President of Antioch.
DIDYMUS, a Roman Officer, converted by and in love with Theodora.
SEPTIMIUS, a Roman Officer, his Friend.
THEODORA, a Christian of Noble Birth.
IRENE, a Christian.
Chorus of Christians.
Chorus of Heathens.

PART I. SCENE I.

RECITATIVE.

Valens.

'TIS Diocletian's natal day.
Proclaim, throughout the bounds of Antioch,
A feast, and solemn sacrifice to Jove.
Whoso disdains to join the sacred rites,
Shall feel our wrath, in chastisement, or death.
And this, Septimius, take you in charge.

AIR.

Go, my faithful soldier, go.
Let the fragrant incense rise,
To Jove, great ruler of the skies;

CHORUS.

And draw a blessing down,
On his imperial crown,
Who rules the world below.

Did. Vouchsafe, dread Sir, a gracious ear
To my request. Let not your sentence doom
To racks and flames, all, all, whose scrup'lous minds
Will not permit them, or to bend the knee
To gods they know not, or in wanton mood
To celebrate the day with Roman rites.

Val. Art thou a Roman, and yet dar'st defend
A sect rebellious to the gods and Rome?

Did. Many there are in Antioch, who disdain
An idol-offering, yet are friends to Cæsar.

Val. It cannot be: they are not Cæsar's friends,
Who own not Cæsar's gods. I'll hear no more.

AIR.

Racks, gibbets, sword, and fire,
Shall speak my vengeful ire,
Against the stubborn knee:
Nor gushing tears,
Nor ardent pray'rs,
Shall shake our firm decree.

CHORUS *of* Heathens.

For ever thus stand fix'd the doom
Of rebels to the gods and Rome:
While sweeter than the trumpet's sound,
Their groans and cries are heard around.

SCENE II.

RECITATIVE.

Did. Most cruel edict! Sure, thy gen'rous soul,
Septimius, abhors the dreadful task
Of persecution. Ought we not to leave
The free-born mind of man, still ever free?
Since vain is the attempt, to force belief
With the severest instruments of death.

AIR.

The raptur'd soul defies the sword,
Secure of virtue's claim;
And trusting Heav'n's unerring word,
Enjoys the circling flame.
No engines can a tyrant find
To storm the truth-supported mind.

RECITATIVE.

Sep. I know thy virtues, and ask not thy faith;
Enjoy it as you will, my Didymus.
Tho' not a christian, (for I worship still
The gods my fathers worship'd) yet, I own,
Something within declares for acts of mercy.
But Antioch's president must be obey'd;
Such is the Roman discipline; while we
Can only pity whom we dare not spare.

AIR.

Descend, kind pity, heav'nly guest,
Descend, and fill each human breast
With sympathizing woe.
That liberty, and peace of mind,
May sweetly harmonize mankind,
And bless the world below.

SCENE III.

Theodora, *with the Christians.*

RECITATIVE.

Though hard, my friends, yet wholesome are the truths
Taught in affliction's school: whence the pure soul
Rises refin'd, and soars above the world.

AIR.

Fond, flatt'ring world, adieu!
Thy gaily smiling pow'r,
Empty treasures,
Fleeting pleasures,

Ne'er ſhall tempt, or charm me more.
Faith inviting,
Hope delighting,
Nobler joys we now purſue.

RECITATIVE.

Ire. O bright example of all goodneſs!
How eaſy ſeems affliction's heavy load,
While thus inſtructed, and companion'd thus,
As 'twere, with heav'n converſing, we look down
On the vain pomp of proud proſperity!

AIR.

Bane of virtue, nurſe of paſſions,
Soother of vile inclinations,
Such is, proſperity, thy name.
True happineſs is only found,
Where grace, and truth, and love abound,
And pure religion feeds the flame.

CHORUS.

Come, mighty Father, mighty Lord,
With love our ſouls inſpire:
While grace, and truth, flow from thy word,
And feed the holy fire.

SCENE IV.

RECITATIVE.

Meſ. Fly, fly, my brethren; heathen rage
Purſues us ſwift,
Arm'd with the terrors of inſulting death.
Ire. Ah! whither ſhould we fly? or fly from whom?
The Lord is ſtill the ſame, to day, for ever:
And his protection here, and ev'ry where.
Tho' gath'ring round our deſtin'd heads
The ſtorm now thickens, and looks big with fate;
Still ſhall thy ſervants wait on thee, O Lord,
And in thy ſaving mercy put their truſt.

AIR.

As with roſy ſteps the morn
Advancing, drives the ſhades of night;
So from virtuous toils well-borne,
Raiſe thou our hopes of endleſs light,
Triumphant Saviour! Lord of day!
Thou art the life, the light, the way.

CHORUS.

All pow'r in heav'n above, or earth beneath,
Belongs to thee alone,
Thou Everlaſting One,
Mighty to ſave, in perils, ſtorm, and death.

SCENE V.

Enter Septimius.

RECITATIVE.

Sep. Miſtaken wretches! why thus blind to fate,
Do ye in private oratories dare
Oppoſe the preſident's decree? and ſcorn
With native rites to celebrate the day,
Sacred to Cæſar, and protecting Jove?

AIR.

Dread the fruits of chriſtian folly,
And this ſtubborn Melancholy;
Fond of life and liberty.
Chains, and dungeons are ye wooing,
And the ſtorm of death purſuing;
Rebels to the known decree.

RECITATIVE.

The. Deluded mortal! call it not rebellion,
That thus we perſevere in ſpirit, and truth,
To worſhip God: It is his dread command,
His, whom we cannot, dare not, diſobey,
Tho' death be our reward.
Sep. Death is not yet thy doom;
But worſe than death to ſuch a virtuous mind,
Which Didymus wants eloquence to praiſe.
Lady, theſe guards are order'd to convey you,
To the vile place, a proſtitute, to whom
Valens thinks proper to devote your charms.
The. O worſe than death indeed!—Lead me, ye guards,
Lead me, or to the rack, or to the flames;
I'll thank your gracious mercy.

AIR.

Angels, ever bright, and fair,
Take, O take me to your care:
Speed to your own courts my flight,
Clad in robes of virgin white.

[*Exit with* Septimius.

SCENE VI.

Enter Didymus.

RECITATIVE.

Did. Unhappy happy crew!—why ſtand you thus
Wild with amazement? ſay, where is my love,
My kind inſtructor in fair virtue's path,
My life, my Theodora? Has the tyrant
Seiz'd on his guiltleſs prey?
Ire. Alas! ſhe's gone.
Too late thou cam'ſt to ſave, (if in thy pow'r
To ſave) the faireſt, nobleſt, beſt of women.
A Roman ſoldier led her trembling hence
To the vile place, where Venus keeps her court.
Yet on his brow reluctance ſeem'd to ſit,
And helpleſs pity bade us wait our doom.

AIR.

Did. Kind Heav'n, if virtue be thy care
With courage fire me,
Or art inſpire me,
To free the captive fair.
On the wings of the wind will I fly,
With this princeſs to live, or this chriſtian to die.

[*Exit.*

RECITATIVE.

Ire. O love! how great thy pow'r! but greater ſtill,
When virtue prompts the ſteady mind to prove
The native ſtrength in deeds of higheſt honour.

CHORUS.

Go, gen'rous, pious youth,
May all the pow'rs above
Reward thy virtuous love,
Thy conſtancy and truth;
With Theodora's charms,
Free from theſe dire alarms:
Or crown you with the bleſt,
In glory, peace, and reſt.

PART II.

SCENE I.

RECITATIVE.

Valens.

YE men of Antioch, with ſolemn pomp,
Renew the grateful ſacrifice to Jove:
And while your ſongs aſcend the vaulted ſkies,
Pour on the ſmoking altars floods of wine
In honour of the ſmiling deities,
Fair Flora and the Cyprian queen.

CHORUS.

Queen of ſummer, queen of love,
And thou cloud-compelling Jove;
Grant a long and happy reign
To great Cæſar, king of men.

AIR.

Val. Wide ſpread his name,
And make his glory
Of endleſs fame
The laſting ſtory.

RECITATIVE.

Return, Septimius, to the ſtubborn maid,
And learn her final reſolution.
I, ere the ſun with prone career has reach'd
The weſtern iſles, ſhe deigns an offering
To the great gods, (who ſubjected the world
To conqu'ring Rome) ſhe ſhall be free. If not,
The meaneſt of my guards with luſtful joy
Shall triumph o'er her boaſted chaſtity.

CHORUS.

Venus laughing from the ſkies
Will applaud her votaries:
When ſeizing the treaſure,
We revel in pleaſure,
And revenge ſweet love ſupplies.

SCENE II.

Theodora, *in her Place of Confinement.*

RECITATIVE.

O thou bright ſun! how ſweet thy rays,
To health, and liberty! but here, alas!
They ſwell the agonizing thought of ſhame,
And pierce my ſoul with ſorrows yet unknown.

AIR.

With darkneſs deep as is my woe,
Hide me, ye ſhades of night.
Your thickeſt veil around me throw,
Conceal'd from human ſight.
Or come, thou death, thy victim ſave,
Kindly emboſom'd in the grave.

[*Symphony of ſoft Muſick.*]

RECITATIVE.

But why art thou diſquieted my ſoul?
Hark! Heav'n invites thee in ſweet rapt'rous ſtrains
To join the ever-ſinging, ever-loving choir
Of ſaints and angels in the courts above.

AIR.

O that I on wings cou'd riſe,
Swiftly ſailing through the ſkies,
As ſkims the ſilver dove;
That I might reſt,
For ever bleſt,
With harmony and love.

SCENE III.

RECITATIVE.

Did. Long had I known thy friendly ſocial ſoul,
Septimius, oft experienc'd in the camp,
And perilous ſcenes of war, when ſide by ſide
We fought, and brav'd the dangers of the field,
Dependent on each other's arm: with freedom, then,
I will diſcloſe my mind. I am a chriſtian;
And ſhe, who by Heav'n's influential grace,
With pure religious ſentiments inſpir'd
My ſoul, with virtuous love inflam'd my heart:
Ev'n ſhe, who, ſhame to all humanity!
Is now condemn'd to public luſt.

Sept. No more:
The ſhame reflects too much upon thy friend,
The mean, tho' duteous, inſtrument of power;
Knowing her virtues only, not thy love.

AIR.

Tho' the honours, that Venus, and Flora receive
From the Romans, this chriſtian refuſes to give;
Yet nor Venus, nor Flora, delight in the woe,
That diſfigures their faireſt reſemblance below.

RECITATIVE,

Did. O ſave her then, or give me pow'r to ſave
By free admiſſion to th' impriſon'd maid.

Sept. My guards, not leſs aſham'd of their vile office,
Will ſecond your intent, and pleaſure me.

Did. I will reward them with a bounteous heart,
And you, my friend, with all that Heav'n can give
To the ſincerity of pray'r.

AIR.

Deeds of kindneſs to diſplay,
Pity ſuing,
Mercy wooing,
Who the call can diſobey?
But the opportune redreſs
Of virtuous beauty in diſtreſs,
All earth will praiſe, and Heav'n repay.

SCENE IV.

Irene *with the Chriſtians.*

RECITATIVE.

The clouds begin to veil the hemiſphere,
And heavily bring on the night; the laſt
Perhaps to us. Oh! that it were the laſt
To Theodora, ere ſhe fall a prey
To unexampled luſt and cruelty.

AIR.

Defend her, Heav'n. Let angels ſpread
Their viewleſs tents around her bed:
Keep her from vile aſſaults ſecure,
Still ever calm, and ever pure,

SCENE V. Theodora's *place of confinement.*
Didymus *at a diſtance, the Vizor of his helmet diſcloſ'd.*

RECITATIVE.

Or lull'd with grief, or, rapt her ſoul to heav'n,
In innocence of thought, entranc'd ſhe lies;
Her beauty ſhining ſtill like Cynthia,
Riſing in clouded majeſty. [*Approaching her.*

AIR.

Sweet roſe and lily, flow'ry form,
Take me, your faithful guard;
To ſhield you from bleak wind and ſtorm:
A ſmile be my reward.

RECITATIVE.

The. [*Starting.*] O ſave me, Heav'n, in this my perilous hour!

Did. Start not, much injur'd princeſs—I come not
As one this place might give you cauſe to dread,
But your deliverer; ſent by juſt Heav'n
To ſave the world's unrival'd ornament
Of virtue, faith, and every chriſtian grace;
And that dear ornament to Theodora,
Her angel purity. If you vouchſafe
But to change habit with—your Didymus.

[*Diſcovering himſelf.*

The. ——Excellent youth!
I know thy courage, virtue, and thy love;
And never can conſent they ſhould deſtroy.
Their author. This becomes not Theodora,
But the blind enemies of truth. Oh, no;
It muſt not be. Yet Didymus can give
A boon, will make me happy, nor himſelf
Endanger.

Did. How! or what? my ſoul with tranſport
Liſtens to the requeſt.

AIR.

The. The pilgrim's home, the ſick man's health,
The captive's ranſom, poor man's wealth,
From thee I wou'd receive.
Theſe, and a thouſand treaſures more,
That gentle death has now in ſtore,
Thy hand and ſword can give.

RECITATIVE *accompanied.*

Did. Forbid it, Heav'n!
Shall I deſtroy the life I came to ſave?
Shall I in Theodora's blood embrue
My guilty hands; and give her death, who taught
Me firſt to live?
Or ſay, what right have I
To take, what juſt reflection bids confeſs
Not at your own diſpoſal? Think it too
No leſs a crime, if thus inflexible

Your safety you refuse. Time forbids more:
Straight then resolve to gain your liberty,
Preserve your honour, and secure your life.
The. Ah! what is life or liberty to me,
That Didymus must purchase with his own?
Did. Fear not for me. The Pow'r that led me hither
Will guard me hence; if not, his will be done.
The. Yes, kind deliverer, I will trust that Pow'r
To hear my pray'r for thee, so lately heard
For Theodora, who had ne'er expos'd
Her friend, to shun a danger that concern'd
Only her life.—Farewel, thou gen'rous youth.
Did. Farewel, thou mirror of the virgin state.

DUET.

The. To thee, thou glorious son of worth,
Did. To thee, whose virtues suit thy birth,
The. Be life and safety giv'n;
Did. Be ev'ry blessing giv'n.
Both. I hope again to meet on earth,
But sure shall meet in heav'n.

SCENE VI.

Irene *with the Christians.*

RECITATIVE.

'Tis night, but night's kind blessing is deny'd
To grief like ours.—How can we think of sleep,
While Theodora wakes to misery;
And threat'ning death hangs hovering o'er our heads!
Be pray'r our refuge; pray'r to Him who rais'd,
And still can raise, the dead to life and joy.

CHORUS.

He saw the lovely youth, death's early prey;
Alas! too early snatch'd away!
He heard his mother's funeral cries:
Rise, youth, he said—the youth begins to rise;
Lowly the matron bow'd, and bore away the prize.

PART III.

SCENE I.

Irene *with the Christians.*

AIR.

LORD, to thee, each night and day,
Strong in hope, we sing and pray:
Tho' convulsive rocks the ground,
And thy thunders roll around;
Still to thee, each night and day,
Strong in hope, we sing and pray.

SCENE II.

Enter Theodora, *in the Habit of* Didymus.

RECITATIVE.

Ire. But see, the good, the virtuous Didymus!
Wakeful, as Philomel, with throbbing heart,
He comes to join with us in pray'r
For Theodora.

[Theodora, *discovering herself.*

The. No; heav'n has heard your pray'rs for Theodora:
Behold her safe. Oh! that as free, and safe,
Were Didymus, my kind deliverer!
But let this habit speak the rest.

AIR.

When sunk in anguish and despair,
I cried to Heav'n, Heav'n heard my pray'r,
And bade a tender father's care
The generous youth employ.
The generous youth obey'd, and came,
All rapt in love's divinest flame,
To save a wretched virgin's fame,
And turn her grief to joy.

CHORUS.

Blest be the hand, and blest the Pow'r,
That in the dark and dangerous hour
Sav'd thee from cruel strife.
Lord, favour still the kind intent,
And bless thy gracious instrument
With liberty and life.

SCENE III.

RECITATIVE.

Mes. Undaunted in the court stands Didymus,
Virtuously proud of rescued innocence;
But vain to save the generous hero's life,
Are all intreaties, e'en from Romans vain.
And high-enrag'd the president protests,
Shou'd he regain the fugitive, no more
To try her with the fear of infamy,
But with the terrors of a cruel death.
Ire. Ah! Theodora, whence this sudden change
From grief's pale looks, to looks of redd'ning joy?

RECITATIVE *accompany'd.*

The. O my Irene, Heav'n is kind;
And Valens too is kind, to give me pow'r
To execute in turn my gratitude,
While safe my honour.
Stay me not, dear friend;
Only assist me, with a proper dress,
That I may ransom the too generous youth.

DUET.

Ire. Whither, princess, do you fly,
Sure to suffer, sure to die?
The. No, no, Irene, no;
To life and joy I go.
Ire. Vain attempt. O stay, O stay.
The. Duty calls—I must obey.

[*Exit* Theodora.

RECITATIVE.

Ire. She's gone, disdaining liberty and life,
And every honour this frail life can give.
Devotion bids aspire to nobler things,
To boundless love, and joys ineffable.
And such her expectation from kind Heav'n.

AIR.

New scenes of joy come crouding on,
While sorrow fleets away,
Like mists before the rising sun,
That gives a glorious day.

SCENE IV.

Valens *to* Didymus.

RECITATIVE.

Val. Is it a christian virtue, then,
To rescue from the hands of justice, one
Condemn'd by my authority?
Did. Such my religion, it condemns all crimes,
None more than disobedience to just pow'r.
And had your sentence doom'd her but to death,
I then might have deplor'd your cruelty,
And not attempted to defeat it. Yet
I own no crime, unless it be a crime
To've hinder'd you from perpetrating that
Which wou'd have made you odious to mankind;
At least the fairest half.
Val. Aye, aye, fond man!
It was the charms of beauty, not of virtue,
That prompted you to save her. Take him hence,
And lead him to repentance, or—to death.

SCENE V.

Enter Theodora.

RECITATIVE.

The. Be that my doom. You may inflict it here
With legal justice, there 'tis cruelty.
If blood your angry laws require; behold,
The principal is come to pay the debt.
And welcome sure to Romans the exchange,

A warlike hero for an helpleſs maid.
Sep. Dwells there ſuch virtuous courage in the ſex!
Preſerve them, O ye gods, preſerve them both.
Ye Romans, join in the requeſt, if e'er
Lucretia's memory was dear to you,
Or this your leader's valour and renown.

AIR.

From virtue ſprings each generous deed,
That claims our grateful pray'r.
Let juſtice for the hero plead,
And pity ſave the fair.

AIR.

Val. Ceaſe, ye ſlaves, your fruitleſs pray'r;
The pow'rs below
No pity know,
For the brave, or for the fair:
Ceaſe, ye ſlaves, your fruitleſs pray'r.

Didymus *to* Septimus.

'Tis kind, my friends; but kinder ſtill,
If for this daughter of Antiochus,
In mind as noble as her birth, your pray'rs
Prevail, that Didymus alone ſhall die.

To Theodora.

Had I as many lives as virtues thou,
Freely for thee I would reſign them all.
The. Oppoſe not, Didymus, my juſt deſires:
For know, that 'twas diſhonour I decliu'd,
Not death; moſt welcome now, if Didymus
Were ſafe, whoſe only crime was my eſcape.

CHORUS.

How ſtrange their ends,
And yet how glorious;
Where each contends
To fall victorious!
Where virtue it's own innocence denies,
And for the vanquiſh'd the glad victor dies!

RECITATIVE.

Didymus *to* Valens.

On me your frowns, your utmoſt rage exert;
On me, your priſoner in chains.
The. Thoſe chains
Are due to me, and death to me alone.
Val. Are ye then judges for yourſelves?
Not ſo our laws are to be trifled with.
If both plead guilty, 'tis but equity,
That both ſhould ſuffer.

AIR.

Ye miniſters of juſtice, lead them hence;
I cannot, will not, bear ſuch inſolence:
And as our gods they honour or deſpiſe,
Fall they their ſupplicants—or ſacrifice.

[*Exit.*

SCENE VI.

RECITATIVE.

Did. And muſt ſuch beauty ſuffer!
The. Such uſeful valour be deſtroy'd!
Sep. Deſtroy'd,
Alas! by an unhappy conſtancy!

RECITATIVE.

Did. Yet deem us not unhappy, gentle friend,
Nor raſh; for life we neither hate nor ſcorn:
But think it a cheap purchaſe for the prize
Reſerv'd in heav'n for purity and faith.

AIR.

Streams of pleaſure ever flowing,
Fruits ambroſial ever growing,
Golden thrones,
Starry crowns,
Are the triumphs of the bleſt.
When from life's dull labours free,
Clad with immortality,
They enjoy a laſting reſt

DUET.

Didymus *and* Theodora.

Thither let our hearts aſpire.
Objects pure of pure deſire,
Still increaſing,
Ever pleaſing,
Wake the ſong, and tune the lyre,
Of the bliſsful holy choir.

SCENE VII.

Irene *with the Chriſtians.*

RECITATIVE.

Ere this their doom is paſt, and they are gone
To prove, that love is ſtronger far than death.

CHORUS.

O love divine, thou ſource of fame,
Of glory, and all joy;
Let equal fire our ſouls inflame,
And equal zeal employ:
That we the glorious ſpring may know,
Whoſe ſtreams appear'd ſo bright below.

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